

TRANSCRIPT—L. C. Ray

Interviewee: L. C. Ray

Interviewer: Zoe Rhine and Joe Newman

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Zoe Rhine: This is Zoe Rhine, librarian at the North Carolina Room here at Pack Library with Joe Newman, board member of the Friends of the North Carolina Room and volunteer and we're going to talk with Reverend L.C. Ray today. Would you mind just saying your name, your full name and spelling it?

L.C. Ray: Hard name. Levonia Cornell Ray. Levonia is L-e-v-o-n-i-a. Cornell is C-o-r-n-e-l-l and Ray, R-a-y.

ZR: Thank you. Now we've got it right for the record and I won't have to worry about it. Our main focus is—we'd like it to be on your time as a student at Stephens-Lee. That's mostly where our interest is, I might try to drag you back here to talk about your experiences in Montford because you were there at a time period that was pretty—it's changed a lot since then. I was wondering if we could just start out with you telling where you lived growing up as a child.

LCR: I lived in the Montford section and really grew up there, born there, in an area that is known to so many as Stumptown. That's right off of Courtland Avenue one way and right off of Pearson Drive the other way. So I grew up there in the Montford section on Morrow Street, 24, 25 Morrow, M-o-r-r-o-w, Street in that section of Asheville.

ZR: I didn't realize that's where you were from. So no wonder you continue to hang out in Montford.

LCR: You're right. I walked up Courtland to Montford, past the Montford School—the Montford School that's always been there—and walked to Hill Street to what was known then as the Black school, Hill Street, and I stayed there from the first grade through the eighth grade. When they built the new school there, where Isaac Dickson is now, they built the new school there, we were the first class to go into that school at that time in the eighth grade, in the new Hill Street School at that time.

ZR: And am I right that's when they replaced what had been a house that was the school?

LCR: Well, no, it was a nice brick building, Hill Street, when I went there I guess it was—I came out of high school in fifty-seven, Stephens-Lee, so I guess in the forties, maybe late forties when I went there as a first grader and I stayed there from the first grade to the eighth grade and my first grade teacher there was Mrs. Cooper. I'll never forget that. And then I had several others and leaving Hill Street, we went to Stephens-Lee in the ninth grade.

ZR: We do have pictures of that school and it was beautiful building.

LCR: It was nice, and they had Mr. Dusenbury when I first went there, was the principal, and then Miss Rita Lee became principal. I'm quite sure you all have information, a lot on her too. She came later but Mr. Dusenbury was the principal at that time when I was—

Joe Newman: How did you get to Stephens-Lee everyday?

LCR: I walked. We walked and—.

JN: Was that typical of the people who lived in Stumptown?

LCR: That's so true.

JN: You all walked over as a group?

LCR: Whether you live in that area, Montford—. Now West Asheville people, they couldn't walk across that bridge, not the new one at West Gate but the other one. And the Southside people, from the south, they walked. From the east, this east side off of College, what we called the Black community, they walked too. They had some buses, they would bus people from Black Mountain, as far as Burnsville, Weaverville and those places. The lady that you just showed me on that thing, Sarah, I think she was bused from—.

ZR: Mars Hill.

LCR: In that area, right, as well as maybe Miss Simmons, at the beginning she could have been bused.

JN: We've been curious about how kids got to Stephens-Lee.

LCR: We walked.

JN: Because there are a lot of stories about kids walking to elementary school. From your neighborhood, Stumptown, over to Catholic Hill is a pretty long hike.

LCR: We had to walk and at that time our parents—my mom had a car later but when I was small she did not. My brothers and—I was the youngest of four brothers and one sister, was older, we had to walk. It was something that was pretty much natural to us and we didn't know at that time, we didn't know much difference. We felt we had to walk and Stephens-Lee persons, many of them rode I'm quite sure, but we had to walk.

ZR: Were there any other teachers at Hill Street that—.

LCR: Miss Burchett, I had Mrs. Cooper in the first grade and I'll never forget that piece. Then I had Miss Burchett, I think she was about in the third grade, my teacher. Mrs. Dusenbury then too over there. Mrs. Hays was my sixth grade teacher. In grade school we didn't have too many male teachers, not too many. The principal was.

JN: Do you remember the name of your principal there?

LCR: Mr. Dusenbury. At Hill Street. And then Miss Lee came in about my last two years. Miss Rita Lee. I'll never forget that she paddled my—I was in sixth grade and she paddled my hand with a little ruler and they would do that then. You would be paddled. I was—.

ZR: You got in trouble?

LCR: You know what boys will do. Nothing serious. I wasn't sent home. But I was paddled. I was paddled at Hill Street by several teachers.

ZR: Miss Rita Lee was Walter Steven Lee's second wife, correct?

LCR: You're right. Great teacher, nice looking lady. I can see her now. She was very—seeing her now, looking back—very sophisticated, smart, and demanded respect and wielded a lot of scruff and I would say, power back then because most respected her, respected her just as much as they did Mr. Dusenberry prior to her. Or more.

JN: Was there any paddling at Stephens-Lee? Or were you all considered too big for that kind of discipline?

LCR: We were a little too large but one Mr. Cowan. You can put his name down and question some other boys. He lived on Clayman. I can see that two-story, white, nice house on Clayman Avenue. And Mr. Cowan would threaten us and I was in the tenth grade then. And he would tell you quickly, 'I'll take you to the cloakroom.' They had cloakrooms then. He would threaten to do it. Mr. Haith, Lacy Haith, he wielded so much scruff that—.

JN: He was a Shop teacher.

LCR: A Shop teacher, but he didn't take much and he built this nice—St. James Church, that wing, you know where they have the Martin Luther King marches start there? St. James Church on College right there? He built that, pretty much literally almost built it himself, that wing on that church. He built that. He would quickly challenge any of us teenagers. Never did challenge me, I was really afraid of my mom, to do too much. But he would. Those two in particular. They had another teacher over there at Stephens-Lee by the name of Mr. Lewis. Mr. Lewis, he was a younger man than Mr. Haith and Mr. Cowan. If any young fellow wanted to challenge him, otherwise he would be willing to

take you on. Mr. Lewis was a tough gentleman but he believed in education and he didn't take any off of the students.

ZR: Joe, excuse me, you keep trying to get to Stephens-Lee and I have one more question before we go on. We all know the unfortunate ending of Stumptown so I just wanted to know how old you were when that happened to you and any thoughts you wanted to say about it.

LCR: Quickly, I stated that I was at the middle school telling this similar story Tuesday, to a gifted class there. Good mixture, Whites and Blacks and a couple Hispanics.

Anyway, leaving Stephens-Lee, my mom was very religious, my dad had left us, and my older sister had left the house but the four boys were there and I was four years younger than my older brother on up. So in the area of Stumptown, naturally I started going to—we all grew up in Hill Street Baptist Church on Hill Street, but my mom and my friends over in Stumptown, they have a church over there by the name of Welfare Baptist. The building is still there. A lot of my friends would go to that church and I told my mom so she said, 'As long as you're in church.' The church moved from there, by the name of New Vision now in Shiloh, they moved that there but it was there on Madison Street, 27. My mom said, 'As long as you stay in church, and do whatever's right.' So I did.

ZR: So she went there and you went here.

LCR: You're right, my mom went over to Hill Street. I was baptized in Hill Street. A young lady, my wife, the one you saw there, her brother was on city council before he died, Herb Watts. Maybe you have pictures of him.

ZR: Yeah, we do.

LCR: Watt Daddy, they called him. That was her brother. We married, had a big, as big as you could have at Welfare Church. So I began to take classes over at UNCA, I don't think they called it UNCA then, but whatever they called it. I took Greek and Psychology. I took several there. It was integrated then. So I left there. That went well and then I enrolled at Mars Hill College. I wasn't the first, Oralene was the first. And I came out of Mars Hill College.

ZR: You were second.

LCR: Close maybe. Anyway, I came out of Mars Hill College and went on to Wake Forest Graduate School for my seminary degree. I was called to preach in that little church there, Welfare. My deceased pastor was a great man, the Reverend Posey, licensed and ordained me and Mary had a little boy, a little son, and I was called, I had finished at Mars Hill and I was called to a church in Fletcher. I was called to two churches but I took the one, Greater New Zion Baptist Church and I stayed there thirty-nine years. Thirty-eight and a half years at one church. They've got gangs of pictures up at Citizens-Times of it because we stayed in the paper on a lot of stuff there. Anyway, back to Stephens-Lee. But that pretty much allowed the history of what I was. I was the first director of Shaw University. I brought it here in eighty-one I think and that on the record too, I was the first director there. All that was part of after I came out of Stephens-Lee, after I had come out of college, after I had three children. In short, that's some of my—I was the director of the YMI Cultural Center from ninety-three to ninety-five when they were going through real troubling times. I'll never forget Al Whitesides, old man Jesse Ray, the Daddy Ray, and Roger McGuire, who owned quite much of in town, they came to me and asked if I would take on that responsibility because it was real bad.

JN: I think you saved that YMI, from I've heard.

LCR: I got it out of debt. I caught a lot of slack but being a preacher, I did, I kind of thought several times maybe I shouldn't have, but it went well.

ZR: Were you working with Johnny Baxter then or was he later?

LCR: He was later.

ZR: During the "getting it on the register."

LCR: You're right, it was later he came on. Wanda, she was director then, Wanda Coleman. I know she's very smart.

ZR: She was in our library not too long ago.

LCR: You're right. Well, I took over from her and I was asked to do that pro bono. Al Whitesides is one of the commissioners now, he was the Chairman of the Board. We all grew up in Stumptown. He grew up there too. And Roger. I had known Roger and I knew his daughters pretty well and I knew him from Pack Place. They said, 'Call Reverend Ray.'

ZR: If you want something done.

LCR: So that's how that happened.

ZR: That's a good round picture. Tell me again what year you started at Stephens-Lee.

LCR: It had to be fifty-four. I came out in fifty-seven. I'll never forget, when I graduated I almost got hit by a car on Pack Square. You know how students graduate and run and holler and so forth, I'll never forget crossing, three or four of us, and a car almost hit us.

We got hollering, going through town hollering. I'll never forget that, I almost got hit.

But I came out in fifty-seven.

ZR: I should have started out with this, were either of your parents native to Asheville?

LCR: Yes, my mom and dad.

ZR: Can we get their names for the record?

LCR: My mom: Sadie. Orlandan Ray. Most of the Rays are from, I've got a lot of Rays, from Weaverville, Mars Hill and all that, through that area. My dad was from out there. My mom was born here. She grew up in the East End section. Sadie Forney was her name and she married a Ray.

ZR: Was she related to Gladys Forney?

LCR: No, no, no. Gladys came from down east. She was one of my teachers at Shaw when I worked at Shaw.

JN: So she was teaching for the university?

LCR: Yes, she taught for me. As long as I was there, Gladys was one of my teachers.

Gladys and another one there was Verita Woods. She taught at Stephens-Lee, I mean she taught at Asheville High a long time. She didn't come out of Stephens-Lee.

JN: We've heard a lot about Miss Forney.

LCR: Gladys taught for me but I wasn't in her class at Stephens-Lee. I wasn't in her class but I knew Miss Forney just like if she was my older sister. I knew her well.

ZR: So, your mother's parents, were they native to Asheville?

LCR: As far as I know. My grandma—they lived on Ridge Street, my grandparents lived on Ridge Street. My mom grew up on Ridge—.

JN: Ridge is up behind where the school used to be, up there on the hill.

LCR: You're right and I think my brother has a picture of my mom when she was young on the porch on Ridge Street. On my mom's side, they owned a lot of land in Weaverville back then, I guess it was back in the twenties, maybe earlier than that, but they owned a lot of land for Black people to—I don't know a lot of the history behind it but I can remember my mom taking me, I guess we were all on the bus, being the youngest child she would carry me up to Weaverville at their farm out there and there was a man by the name of—a White gentleman that bought it by the name of Massey. M-a-s-s-e-y. I'm quite sure he has family people still out there. They bought all that land from my mom and her sister. Not my daddy but my mom and her sister. So my mom got tired of paying the tax on it and she sold it and if my older brothers had known, they could have, but they didn't. They knew because they were older than I was, they should have protected that piece but they didn't know how. They didn't do it so I never forget when my mom sold it, when her and her sister sold it, she invested all of us boys so much, I don't know what it was, three thousand, or four thousand or what, and that was a good start for my wife and me when we got married because we had, not a nest egg but five or six thousand dollars back then was like thirty thousand now. So that's some of my background. We owned the land, they owned the land, in Weaverville. On—I almost said Macedonia Road—but in that area.

ZR: Could I get your mother's parents' name? Your memory's doing so good, I thought I'd throw that one at you.

ECR: It was Mr. and Mrs. Forney. Her first name I do not know because my grandma was dead when I was—. My sister, which is the oldest, she knew a lot of that history, but at her age now she can't quite tell it like she did—.

JN: Did your mother go to school here? Do you remember what school she went to?

ECR: Evidently she went to Stephens-Lee. And Hill Street. No, no, I don't know about Hill Street because she lived on the Eastern Side. She might have gone to Mountain Street. More than likely my mom went to Mountain Street because she lived, she grew up on this side, not on the side where we lived, where we grew up at. She had to, I would think, and my sister would know, my brother next to me wouldn't know, but my sister would know because she knew her grandma.

ZR: I bet we could find them in our city directories. Am I right that your mother grew up on Ridge Street, so her parents would have lived there?

LCR: That's right. She grew up there. She was born here and her sister was born here and they had a brother but they never did, in my life, they never did find him, don't know what happened. Sometimes people would keep up with each other, sometimes they would not. So I would not know. But her sister—.

ZR: That's a great story.

LCR: —moved to Knoxville and I'll never forget when she died we all went down to Knoxville and had her funeral. My mom's older sister, my mom was the youngest.

ZR: Does anything about being at Stephens-Lee stand out the most in your memory?

LCR: It was good, and that's what information you all wanted.

ZR: These other—we go down many roads, don't we?

LCR: Stephens-Lee was great. Miss () that was the Music teacher, a great Music teacher, I was part of her classes as far as in the music side. One key thing I would say, Mr. Moore, we called him Prof. Moore, Clarence Moore, he headed football, basketball and baseball. You know that's how it was then. He had all three major sports and then we had Mr. Blakely served under him and Mr. Blakely, when I came along in high school, and I can think of another one that came along after Mr. Blakely. But anyway, my mom—I was a pretty good football player and we had a place in Stumptown we called The Holler. It was almost, the gates were almost there at Riverside Cemetery. We did a lot of walking over there with girls, you know, on Sunday after church, walk around and go in the cemetery. The Holler, we played a lot of sports there and I did. I was pretty fair, especially in basketball and football, but my mom would not, and Mr. Moore, Prof. Moore tried. His son, Clarence Moore, Jr. would tell you the same story, 'L.C. Ray, oh yeah, Daddy wanted him.' But my mom, and without a dad in the house, my mom wouldn't let me do it. She would not let me do it. Not that her religion stopped it, but, 'No, you'll get hurt.' But we all did it in the Holler.

JN: Football's pretty rough.

LCR: Yeah, but I loved it. And a lot of my friends, I could name a bunch of them, they would tell Mr. Moore, 'Now be sure to get Levonia.' And his own son would tell you same story. He lives in Dayton now.

ZR: He came to the reunion this summer and I met him.

LCR: You're right. He would tell you. 'Did your daddy want Reverend Ray?' He'll tell you the rest of the story. But my mom would not let me. So that was a good thing for us, but like I said, my mom was so cautious with us, my daddy not being there. Like I did for my kids, 'Get out there, boy.' Mr. Moore was a great man and his staff, the few he had did, nothing like the other schools would have. But he always had a winning team. Always had that, so he was a—.

JN: Had the band program started then?

LCR: Oh, yeah. It was strong. Mr. Lennon—.

JN: Doc Lennon.

LCR: Doc Lennon was—

JN: He was already there when you were there?

LCR: He was there when we got there and Miss () over the music was there when we got there. They were great individuals.

ZR: I was going to ask you what you did musically.

LCR: Well, I would sing. I did a lot of singing in church. Not the greatest but I did a lot of that. But the main thing, I wanted really to play sports. That wasn't going to happen at my house growing up. I can say, my brother who is not a preacher but is a deacon in Nazareth First Baptist right over here, I just don't know anything he did wrong growing up. I don't know anything. He was in the twelfth grade when I was in the ninth grade, but he would watch me, you know how brothers kind of cover for each other? He wouldn't

do it. If he'd see me he would tell my mama always. So that is a lot of people that I came up with, they would pretty much tell the Ray story, 'Miss Sadie Ray would not let her boys do like some things that we would do.' It didn't have to be bad, just common things. But those two people were great. Miss Harrison—I know you all have her—lived on Ridge. I would say I watched her, just looking back, more than I did the rest I guess. She would be top in my book.

JN: What was her subject?

ZR: Is that Lucy?

LCR: Lucy, yes. I don't know but I would really listen to her. I listened to all of them, pretty much had to. But she was—I had her in the ninth grade and I guess coming out of Hill Street in the eighth going into that, she set a lot of great tones for me. I can look back now and say that I couldn't say it then. She was firm, she was strong, but she was nice. She pretty much I would say that, steered me and I guess she knew my mom because my mom grew up over there. I guess she did but I don't know that for sure but she was very strong. Mr. Lewis, I was in one of his classes and I was halfway scared of him.

ZR: Somehow I've missed him. I haven't—.

LCR: He was intelligent. His wife taught too, Miss Lewis. They both taught. He was so—if you little ninth or tenth graders think you're tough, he would let you know.

JN: He was one of the ones who would threaten to take you all out to the—.

LCR: Mr. Cowan did that. Mr. Cowan would take you to the cloakroom. 'If you think you're so tough, come on back to the cloakroom.' But Mr. Lewis was just, he was a

different type of person. You don't get too tough that he wouldn't come back at you. But Mr. Cowan came back at you in another way. Mr. Haith, who was over that other part, they would just get literally mad, Mr. Haith would, you know, 'if you want me...'. They would do that. Mr. Lewis didn't say it that way.

JN: Now Mr. Haith, I believe, was a minister.

LCR: Eventually. He became a minister. Not in school.

JN: And then he became active in civil rights too.

LCR: Very much. You're right. But in school he was just Mr. Haith but he became a very good minister after I was () and he worked real hard in that church, St. James Church, and he built that wing. I guess they call it the Haith wing now.

ZR: You might be a good one to ask—maybe the church you went to growing up would be different because it wasn't in the Stephens-Lee direct community but did you know of your minister being involved in Stephens-Lee in any way?

LCR: No, he did not. The pastor that baptized me, Dr. Dixon. I know you have Dr. Avery in your book, he was the pastor for so long at Hill Street, fifty-one years. A long time. I left to go to the Welfare Church because my mom said, 'Fine.' So Reverend Posey was very intelligent. I think he came out of college but he wasn't involved like Dr. Avery was. Or Dr. White at the Mount Zion Church. Like Dr. Dunn at Nazareth Church. Those men I guess through other sources and other areas, they saw growing up here, I guess they saw a lot in me. I know Dr. White did from Mt. Zion, that was before John Grant, who then I came. Dr. White recommended to the university in Raleigh, because he served on the board, he was president of the state convention and all that, but he was the pastor

of Mount Zion there, Dr. White. He recommended to the school to those in authority there that when they came up with the idea to have an off-campus program here, he recommended that L. C. Ray be the director, Dr. White did. I wouldn't have. I know it. No one else would have recommended that but Dr. White. And he recommended not only that but several other things. I've been president of the Baptists for thirty years, for thirty years. And that was because of Dr. White. I'll never forget, he recommended to those that was in authority some thirty, thirty-one years ago, that he was president and he recommended that I succeed him.

ZR: It's nice to have people like that.

LCR: You're right. I say that everywhere I go and a lot of the older preachers know that story but I wouldn't have never been placed in because I didn't come out of Shaw. I have an honorary Doctorate from Shaw but I didn't come out of Shaw. But he recommended to them that I be the one.

JN: Reverend Lee, when you graduated and later became a minister, did you stay involved with Stephens-Lee?

LCR: I did.

JN: In what ways would you help out?

LCR: I've done quite a few things. The alumni, we used to have services, religious services and you never find but so many ministers in any graduating class, the seniors in that high school, you're not going to have but maybe two or three ministers. Maybe you have that. So I've spoken at, I don't know how many of their services. Well, I was the last speaker for the baccalaureate at Asheville High. They don't have baccalaureates now.

That was all they used to have when I came along, baccalaureates and then you had the graduations. But I was the last baccalaureate speaker in eighty-six or eighty-eight, for Asheville High. I was their last speaker. And they haven't had baccalaureates since. But in that First Baptist Church right over here, I was their last speaker. So I've done a lot of that. If I didn't do it, C.R. Mosely did it. I know you all got something on Reverend Mosely that just retired from Nazareth. If he didn't speak, I would be the speaker. They had some other ministers, but pretty much we were the two that they would call on to do it. And I think the last one could've been last year, I think last year, because all of the alumni met at my church and automatically I was the speaker.

ZR: Joe and I both read a transcription of an interview that's at UNCA that Lucy Harrison did and the one thing she mentions which we don't have a lot of information on was that the pastors of those area churches were very influential to Stephens-Lee and that she thinks she even got the job because of the church she went to.

LCR: You're right and I've been talking about Baptists but when I came along—although Dr. White, Dr. Avery, whoever was at Nazareth then was very instrumental in a lot of things, St. Matthias, St. James, and especially Hopkins Chapel. I would say those three churches played a much greater role during that part of my life. As I said, Dr. Dixon before he came at Hill Street, they played a pretty important role, especially in the Black community then, but St. Matthias, all their fathers who, you can go back, St. Matthias, because some of the teachers were members at them churches. St. James and especially Calvary Presbyterian. I think Pat Bacon is there now. Calvary Presbyterian Church had about, I guess about twenty teachers in that church when I was growing up, so automatically they would—and I've forgotten that Mr. Burton that was the librarian at

Stephens-Lee, I think he and his wife got killed in a plane crash, they were at Berry Temple, and those churches played a greater role than I would—looking back at it now, than maybe the Baptist Church did. Because so many of the teachers were members of those churches. That's my thought on it but I'm quite sure it was a fact.

ZR: Along the same lines as churches, would you say that the parents of the students were fairly much involved with Stephens-Lee?

LCR: Yeah, much more.

ZR: I know there was a bunch of parent-teachers.

LCR: I would say that back then, and that was so many years ago, most of those parents were not educated as far as having any kind of degree anywhere. Some of them, I'm quite sure a lot of them finished high school but they were more involved. Our parents were more involved at Hill Street School. They had to work pretty much all day, but now parents being involved now is just not there. Every now and then I would go to the city school board, and you don't see any parents there and especially Black parents. They just weren't there. They're just not there now. But I would feel back, then as tired as many of those people were, mothers were, some fathers were, I think that we had a little more involvement especially within the Black schools, the Black church. The men played a much greater role, not much education but at least more of them would show up then than what we're seeing showing up now. I think that was a sad thing.

JN: I was a high school English teacher for a while so I think you're right on it.

LCR: It's sad to see. And we do a lot of, you know we operate some non-profits. One Youth at a Time. And ninety-five per cent of our mentors and tutors are white. We just

cannot—and that wasn't quite the case thirty years ago. We could get more. And we would run things in the Citizen-Times for volunteers, mentors, and if we had twelve to fifteen calls, I would say thirteen out of the fifteen would be Caucasians. And maybe seventy-five per cent of the students need that extra help forward are African-Americans. It's a serious concern. But we have to be fair with it. We just don't have enough now. I'll agree Asheville is not a large populated Black—not like Charlotte or Greensboro or Raleigh, but we could do better. We could do much better. The involvement is just not quite there like it should be.

ZR: Did your mother push you forward in further education?

LCR: She pushed it but you know that's another historical—. On Pearson Drive, not too far from where I live, and I could call some of these people Whites names, I did a lot of yard work. I could get there in ten minutes. If you know where Riverside Cemetery is, Stumptown was right here. And then Montford, all the elite people lived on Montford, the big shots and all the others, doctors and so forth live in that section. We would do a lot of yard work, a few boys. Many of my friends, they caddied on the golf course but I didn't do that. So I would rake leaves and do other things that several of those people in several families and I have no problem recalling their names. They were great people. They pushed my mama, but without a daddy being there, they pushed my mama to let me go to one of the Black colleges in the town they grew up in. One in particular, like in Alabama. What they would tell my mom, we were the help to get him in there. But my mama wasn't going to dare let us leave. 'No, you're not going way off.' But then, being good people, and some of them, the Webbs of the Webb's Insurance Company, the daddy and I think the mom had both died but their mama, the wife's mother, she was a retired school

teacher. And her brother, (), these Whites on Pearson lived in them big houses. () Rhodes, I think three, but () Rhodes and he married one of the daughters of Dr. Milton, off of Pearson Drive on that big—. How's that? He was a doctor and had about three daughters and one of the Rhodes married the daughter but I used to do yard work for them, like at fifteen and sixteen. I used to go over there and do it. They wanted me—I guess they said, 'Well you're a nice boy,' back then that's how people thought, 'We could help him get into one of the Black colleges.' Because you couldn't get into one down here. But my mom would not let that happen. And many of these people, especially the Webbs, that used to own that Webb on Asheland, they supported our non-profit for years because they've known us all their lives and I knew them, they knew us and so forth.

ZR: Now your mother wanted you to go on, didn't she? Or not?

LCR: Not to go—.

ZR: That far away.

LCR: No, no.

ZR: Where she wanted you to go.

LCR: Well she believed in it, but she was so selective in, we couldn't do much. We just couldn't do much. When others would be out there, you know kids playing football, playing baseball on Sunday, we couldn't do it. She wasn't no political or religious fanatic, she wasn't that, but we just couldn't do certain things on Sunday. That's how she saw it.

JN: She wanted you all to stay close.

LCR: Had to. My other friends would be out playing ball. 'You don't do that on Sunday. You go to church.' She was a great person but I wouldn't raise my kids that way.

JN: She was comfortable with you going to Mars Hill.

LCR: I pretty much went in my twenties. I started in college when I got married. I did all my college work straight through. If it had been the time when Oralene went, she would've had a problem. I know she would have. But she didn't have any control over me once I was—.

ZR: Out of the house.

LCR: She didn't have much control over that. But she did have a lot of control and I think that my brother, the one next to me would give you the same stories. My mom was just that type. She was a great person but she was strict on certain things. So I sneaked and I guess I did what everybody else did. I had to do it behind her back.

ZR: And she was working the whole time she was raising—.

LCR: She did. She worked at Mission Hospital. She worked hard, raised us and why that would have been true, see my oldest brother, he went to Indiana Tech, he wanted to be an Engineer. And my mom told him this. My oldest brother, he's nine or ten years older than me, but I knew she told him this. She said, 'If you go up there, if you leave home and go up there, don't you come back here.' He left and went up there and he went. She got on alright but she threatened him that way. And they were in the service, I was the only one who didn't go to the service. But she said if you would go—. That's where he married his

wife, up there in the school and she's a retired principal there. But if he had gone by what my mom had said and so forth, that wouldn't have happened in Indiana where they were.

[Phone rings and is answered by L.C. Ray.]

LCR: My mom was a great person.

ZR: I wish I'd know her.

JN: She sounds like my mother that's why I keep holding back. But I can identify with everything you've said including the Sunday sports. We would sneak and do it anyway. I'd go down three or four yards and play. When you left Stephens-Lee, and then later went to Mars Hill—.

LCR: I went to UNCA, I went over here first. I had about twenty something credits to transfer.

JN: How hard was it, maybe it wasn't hard at all, to come out of an all Black environment and then all of a sudden, I guess it was predominantly White.

ZR: I don't know when UNCA integrated.

JN: Was that a big adjustment, or was that just something, well, this is what I've got to do.

LCR: It was a big adjustment but you see I was so determined. They have that photo of me up there in the Citizen too, I'll never forget, I had just been called to preach and I was—see I did a lot of work in Mud Creek Association and a lot of people throughout Western North Carolina knew me and churches so when I went to UNC Asheville or whatever they called it then—.

JN: Asheville-Biltmore.

LCR: They didn't call it UNCA like they call it now because that's part of the article, 'They've been called to this church, he was a student at the college there,' so I'll never forget that piece. But, I have always been aggressive at a lot of things, to do a lot of things, but by being brought up so strict too, that cut me off from a lot. A lot of things that my friends did, especially those two or three years under me did, as far as trying to bring about from this racial divide, I want to do. What I wanted to do, I wanted to be part of it but she would hold me kind of back and I was a little ahead of those that was part of what Al and a few others were in, that Marvin Chambers, that group.

ZR: ASCORE.

LCR: Yes, ASCORE. Marvin and myself, we are cousins anyway. So I missed a lot of things I wanted but I think I made up for all of that since in my life, the last forty years I've made up a lot of that.

ZR: So you were living in Asheville when ASCORE was active?

LCR: I was.

ZR: Were you aware of what was going on?

LCR: I was aware. But I know that and I was a little ahead of them.

JN: And you knew Al very well.

LCR: Oh yeah, and Marvin too. Marvin and myself are cousins. We lived in the same—next door to each other. They didn't have as much problem with their parents.

ZR: Your mother probably wouldn't let you participate.

LCR: Their parents were strict too, religious people, but my mom, she was just, 'No, you're not going to do that, you'll get in trouble. No, you are not going to do that and get in trouble.' So I've done a lot of work, not to make up for that, but with the Police Department, I've done a lot of work. I've done more work for the Police Department than any other Black not being a Policeman, let's put it that way. I was a Chaplain I guess about twenty years, I've done all that with them. And my wife, you know she retired from there.

ZR: Tell me again what she did, I forgot.

LCR: Crime analysis. And her brother Herb Watt, Watt Daddy, you know he was a Policeman and on City Council and so forth. And they called me, I didn't call them to be a Chaplain. But Dr. White, pretty much the same man, helped push me in that you know. 'Ray, you need to.' So I was.

JN: You have had a very full life, if I might say so.

LCR: Quite much. I have to admit I have and like I said I've been with One Youth, that organization is, this year is the twenty-fifth year.

ZR: That's a long life span.

LCR: And that program has done a lot in this town, has done a lot in this town. And the areas where there's—right here, (). But Stephens-Lee is and has been and the teachers there, they were strong people. Not just Stephens-Lee but I can say Hill Street too. The

two that I came through, they left some great examples for me. And they also left with an idea within my own mind that education can do it and you have to get it.

ZR: I didn't even ask the question and he answered it. That's amazing.

LCR: So I'm proud of it and I think I was telling you that I believe I was the either the first or second speaker for the Martin Luther King, that breakfast. I was their first or second speaker at the Montford Center.

ZR: I can't believe they held it there.

LCR: For the first two or three years it was held there and it really pretty much came out of some of those pictures that you saw. It didn't come out of Stephens-Lee, it didn't come out of Uptown, it didn't come out of Southside, it didn't come out of (), it came out of that Montford Hills. They have a powerful club there and I was the second Black family to move in that section. Rita Nesbitt, she's in one of your pictures there, she was the first Black family to move on Sylvan over there in that section. And we were the second Black—. I think Oralene moved over there a couple years later.

ZR: And when would that have been?

LCR: That was forty-some years ago. Oh, I guess we've been over there about fifty years.

ZR: Did your mother make that move?

LCR: No, no, my wife and I. We made that move. Then I became—. I had been over there—in your pictures you have, I had been over there at least—maybe not quite two years before they wanted me to be Vice President.

JN: That was the community club?

LCR: One of the strongest in this area. Montford was because the people that lived there and who they were.

JN: Did you have Black and White members or was that mostly—?

LCR: When I joined it was just all White, all White and Rita Nesbitt joined it and I guess I'd been a member about a year. I was on school, pastoring a church and several other things I would do and the community found a lot of that out. Then they found I was doing quite a few things then too at the time, especially in association with the state convention then, the Black State Convention. So I would credit that as they kind of searched because they knew who we were, my family, and they automatically, whatever, wanted you to be part of this community club. Because Highland Hospital played a bit part in that. Most of the meetings were there. They had integrated the neighborhood so they wanted me to be— so they put me according to your records as Vice President under Dr.—I can't think of his name, he was professor at the college and he lived on Pearson. I'll never forget that. So I became his Vice President. And whatever time, two years or whatever the years were, then I became President. And that was a big thing because it was they would run all this in the paper, big thing. And I was coming up through the ranks in the faith community too. I was coming up through the ranks. Men like, White men like Ralph Sexton, not the son over there at Trinity but the daddy. They knew me, and like Gale Brown. I know you all have a lot of stuff, maybe not down here but upstairs, that was director of a mission for the White Baptist preachers. He knew me so he began to say, 'L.C. you need to get in this, man, you need to be part of this.' So being part of everything, and then even when the prayer breakfast came along, 'We want Reverend Ray to be one of the speakers.' So, all that helped, to kind of build your whatever.

JN: I lived in Montford ten years from '06 to '14, not quite ten years. My wife and I did. And I knew Daphne Young, I bet you knew Daphne, her brother got killed I believe in the service, and she still lives over there in Montford Hills. And we called our group the Montford Neighborhood Association. It was the same kind of things that you folks did, we tried to do and I was the newsletter editor and that's how I got to meet Zoe. She would write articles on Montford history and—.

LCR: There's a lot of history down there.

JN: There's a tremendous amount, fascinating history.

LCR: It's major and in that area, back when we moved over there, that's where they lived, unless they lived in Biltmore Forest or Beaver Lake. If they didn't live in Biltmore Forest or Beaver Lake, they lived in Montford. And that was a fact then, and you know you make good of what you—. I was pretty aggressive myself and every opportunity I would try to take advantage of it.

ZR: You've done good. This has been a wonderful interview and wonderful information. I can't thank you enough.

LCR: I didn't mean to tell you all my—.

ZR: Oh, no. We could sit here a couple more hours except I've got to—.

JN: We can go on break and come back. No, we appreciate your time.

LCR: That's a lot of my life story.

ZR: You told it really well to be able to wrap it up in such a short time too.

LCR: I enjoyed it. I had the opportunity to go to other churches in other cities but I decided because I was doing, maybe it was Shaw University, I was doing something and I didn't want to leave certain things to take on other things so I'm kind of glad I stayed here and still a Stephens-Lee alumnus.

END OF INTERVIEW.